DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 448 095 SO 032 340

AUTHOR	Graseck, Susan
TITLE	Youth, Civic Engagement, and International Education.
INSTITUTION	Brown Univ., Providence, RI. Thomas J. Watson, Jr. Inst. for International Studies.
PUB DATE	2000-10-00
NOTE	6p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Choices for the 21st Century Education Project, Watson Institute for International Studies, Box 1948, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912; Tel: 401-863-3155; Fax: 401-863-1247; E-mail: (choices@brown.edu); Web site: http://www.choices.edu.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Citizenship; *Citizenship Education; *Foreign Policy; Global Approach; High Schools; International Communication; International Cooperation; *International Education; *International Relations; International Studies; Public Policy; Social Studies; World Affairs
IDENTIFIERS	Choices for the 21st Century Education Project; Development Education

ABSTRACT

This paper notes the decline of civic participation in the United States, focusing on youth disengagement. It discusses the role of schools in promoting civic education and awareness of international policy. The paper discusses three examples of civic education programs now being offered at the secondary school level: (1) Choices in Education Project; (2) The Capitol Forum; and (3) Operation Day's Work. (BT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 448 095

Youth, Civic Engagement, and International Education.

Graseck, Susan

SO 032 340

Susan Graseck

2A

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

YOUTH, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

As we begin the 21st Century, perhaps nowhere is public engagement more elusive nor more important than in the area of international policy. No longer constrained by a Cold War paradigm, our world today is experiencing a shift toward increasing globalization that informs almost every aspect of our lives. With these changes, a new debate has emerged, one characterized by challenged beliefs and conflicting priorities. This is a unique and compelling moment in our history, a moment that invites response and thoughtful judgment from all sectors of society. Yet, in the United States this is also a time of increasing public apathy about public policy in general and international issues in particular.

The decline of civic participation in the United States is a well-documented trend. Voter turnout is low. In survey after survey, Americans express declining confidence in social and political institutions. As disturbing as these trends may be among the general public, the growing disaffection of the nation's youth is even more alarming. As a recent report by the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) points out, the percentage of young people who vote continues to decline. In 1972, when the voting age was lowered from 21, 50 percent of 18 to 24-year-olds went to the polls. Only 32 percent of this age group voted in the 1996 general election.[1] And projections for 2000 are no more encouraging. There is also a distinct difference between college-educated and non-college educated youth, with 48 percent of those with at least some college experience voting compared to only 25 percent of those with a high school education or less.[2]

While voting is an important act in a democratic society and can serve as a barometer of civic engagement, it is nonetheless only one measure among many. In fact, in a healthy democracy voting occupies only one space in a continuing cycle that includes informing oneself about the issues, weighing options, hearing opposing views, coming to considered judgments and expressing those opinions, and searching for common ground on which to move forward. If our democracy is to hold, we as a public must be engaged on all of these levels because, in a democracy, it is the public's job to define the environment in which policy is made.

Unfortunately, student interest in public policy is weak. A 1998 survey of college freshman found that only 25.9 percent considered political awareness to be a "very important" or "essential" life goal. That figure is dramatically lower than the all-time high of 57.8 percent reported in 1966, the first year of the study. In fact, it is the lowest level of interest recorded in the survey's history. [3] [I know of no similar study of high school youth.]

Compounding this picture, as a nation we are particularly inattentive to news and information about international events. When asked to list the top three problems facing the U.S., respondents to a 1998 poll spontaneously mentioned international concerns only 7.3 percent of the time. This represents a nearly 50 percent drop from 1994, leading the survey's authors to conclude that, "[i]n a post-Cold War world, without a clear-cut 'us v. them' mentality, the relevance of world events appears less evident for many Americans."[4] This lack of interest on the part of the American public makes it difficult for those charged with managing foreign policy to gain the public support necessary to build the foundation of a new and consistent policy direction.

This is the bad news. The good news is that young people, when given an opportunity to become engaged in consideration of the changing international environment and America's role in it, and when

---

[1] U.S. Bureau of Census figures quoted in "New Millennium Project: American Youth Attitudes on Politics, Citizenship, Government and Voting, Phase 1: A Nationwide Survey of 15-24 Year Old Youth, January, 1999," 1999, The National Association of Secretaries of State.

[2] "New Millennium Project," 1999.

[3] "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1998," Sax, L.J., Astin, A.W., Korn, W.S. and Mahoney, K.M., 1998, Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

[4] "American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1999," John E. Reilly, Editor, 1999, The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations.

truly listened to by those in authority, do respond. "People stereotype teenagers as not caring," reported a Rhode Island high school student after participating in a forum on international issues at her state capitol. "But from today, I think the adults realized we are actually thinking about world issues." And according to another young person meeting at his capitol in Lincoln, Nebraska, "I have become more aware of the issues affecting the world. Because of this, the voting process has become much more important to me." [These students were taking part in a program that engages them in the classroom in consideration of a range of international issues and then involves them in a forum with other young people from their state and with elected officials at their state capitol.]

The Role of Schools in the Development of an Informed and Active Public

Historically, one of the goals of public education has been to prepare the nation's youth to assume the responsibilities of active citizenship. If schooling is going to seem relevant and important to today's students, they must see the connections between what they study in school and the skills they will need for adult life.

In the wake of the recent NAEP report on civics, there is renewed emphasis on civic education in our nation's schools. Through these programs school-aged youth will increasingly be introduced within the context of their schools to the processes by which citizens participate in the development of public policy. There are also a number of efforts today to engage college-aged youth and young adults in public life, though typically such efforts are focused on involvement in the local community and engagement in local, state, and national policy issues. Rarely do they engage youth in consideration of international issues. Furthermore, they are by definition focused on post-secondary youth. Important as these efforts are, there is also a third kind of effort that must be nurtured if we are going to have a public that is engaged — vested in our nation and concerned about our world. We need opportunities for school-aged youth to participate in ongoing public debate on the big issues of our time—among them globalization and our nation's role in the international environment. Why the big issues? Why not start locally and work out from there? And why teenaged youth? Why not leave this kind of activity to later? These young people are at a stage in their development when they are not yet fully "wired." They are developing their frames of reference, their identities as public citizens. This is a time when grappling with big value questions and their connection to public policy can contribute to the development of "wiring" that continues to engage young people as they mature. To do this requires engaging students in authentic participatory activities in which their own views on policy direction are sought and valued. Without this experience, it is hard to imagine young people (or anyone) sustaining a longterm interest in international policy.

When considered in the context of the demands that are already placed on our schools, this may sound like a tall order. Any program that is going to successfully integrate consideration of international issues and practice of civic participation skills within the busy schedule of high schools must of necessity be tailored to meet the demands that teachers are facing. While dealing with the usual issues of time in the curriculum and increasing class sizes, teachers today also have to make sure that they are addressing the array of state standards that are emerging. Each state's standards are unique. However, they generally all have some things in common. Among these is an emphasis on higher-order thinking skills including the ability to understand multiple perspectives and competing interpretations; to differentiate among fact, opinion, and interpretation; to weigh the importance and reliability of evidence and explain its significance; to understand the concept of multiple causation; to make connections across time and place; to understand and use primary sources; and to formulate rational conclusions. These are skills that can be very successfully addressed when students are engaged in meaningful activities focused on international concerns. To do so, teachers need materials and programs that meet their classroom and extracurricular needs. The standard textbooks do not provide this. In addition, teachers need support from a range of institutions beyond the school to provide authenticity to the work of their students. And finally, to make all of this happen on a broad scale will require increased public attention to the need to internationalize the curriculum in our public schools and to engage students in responsible dialogue on public issues.

Examples of Programs that Work

What follows are three examples of school-based programs that contribute to the development of an informed and engaged public. Two are programs of the Choices for the 21st Century Education Project at Brown University. The third is a program of USAID. They are by no means the only programs in this field but together they provide insight into the kinds of programs that can be offered at the secondary school level.

Curriculum for the High School Classroom — Choices Education Project

The Choices Education Project brings together the scholarly resources of Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies as well as other research institutions with the pedagogical expertise of classroom educators to develop curricular materials that are designed to help high school teachers to address their educational goals while bringing attention to international concerns. At the heart of every Choices unit is a set of options that highlight sharply contrasting policy directions on a contested international issue. Each option is driven by very different underlying values and each will have distinctive pros and cons, risks and trade-offs.

This methodology grows out of a particular understanding about the interrelated roles that experts and the public play in the framing of public policy. While experts can clarify the goals and tradeoffs the nation must consider, and lay out specific policy choices along with their costs and risks, they have no special insight into which goals should have priority and which risks are worth taking. Articulating goals and accepting risks are activities that are inherently driven by underlying values. It is on this level that public consideration of policy directions is critical. While the public can criticize policies that seem contrary to public priorities, the experts' attention to the consequences and feasibility of various policies can act as a counter to wishful thinking. Finally, putting public priorities into practice requires expertise that the public-at-large cannot provide. These narrower policy decisions are appropriately the responsibility of experts, informed by the values of a public that has deliberated and spoken.[5]

In any Choices unit students are placed in the role of decision-makers as they consider a range of options on an international issue and then decide what they think policy should be. Each unit includes extensive background readings and a role-play or simulation exercise that encourages students to apply their knowledge in an authentic setting. Today, teachers in more than 4,500 schools nationwide are using Choices curricular materials in their classrooms with approximately 700,000 students annually.

The Capitol Forum: Civic Education on International Issues — Choices Education Project

Started in 1997, the Capitol Forum on America's Future is an annual civic education program run on a statewide basis in participating states. The program engages high school students in a dialogue with peers on contested current international issues. The program begins with a teacher workshop in the early fall followed by classroom-based activities leading up to the Forum. The centerpiece of the program — the Forum — brings students to their state capitol in the spring for a full-day public forum to consider the future direction of U.S. policy in the changing international environment. Using interactive simulations and other materials developed by Choices, students explore a range of viewpoints on U.S. foreign policy and consider related issues including conflict and conflict resolution, trade and the global economy, global environmental problems, and immigration. Elected officials attend the Forum to listen to student views, answer questions, and discuss issues of public policy with them. After the Forum, student representatives return to their classes to engage their peers in further deliberation. The program culminates in the *Student Ballot on America's Future* completed by the students who attended the Capitol Forum as well as their classmates. The results of these ballots are reported to elected officials, the news media, and high schools in participating states. The Capitol Forum program is also a professional development program for participating teachers who are provided with extensive curricu-

---

[5] Richard Smoke, *"The Public, The Soviets, and Nuclear Arms: Four Futures: Alternatives for Public Debate and Policy Development"* (Providence, RI: Center for Foreign Policy Development at Brown University & the Public Agenda Foundation, 1987).

lum resources, training, and a peer network, all focused on enhancing international and civic education in their classrooms.

To make all of this possible, the program draws organizations that are not typically engaged in secondary education, nor typically in international education at any level, into extended collaboration with schools, teachers, and students. In each participating state, the Capitol Forum is a collaboration among the Choices Education Project, the Secretary of the State, a variety of statewide organizations whose missions include civic participation and youth leadership (such as a state Humanities Council, World Affairs Council, League of Women Voters, or Department of Education), and local teachers. By taking this approach the program adds new and different organizations to the core of those working to bring international issues into public focus and contributes to an increase in international and civic education in secondary schools.

Operation Day's Work — USAID

Sponsored by USAID, Operation Day's Work (ODW) introduces students at the secondary level to development issues. The concept originated in Norway and Sweden in the 1960s. USAID initiated it in the U.S. in 1998. ODW-USA is a student-directed development education program that helps students gain a better understanding of the role of international development and global interdependence through participation in a variety of service-learning activities. Representatives of each school come together in a conference in the fall to choose a country to be the focus of development assistance funds that will be earned by the students during the year. Once the country has been selected, USAID solicits grant proposals from US NGOs operating in that country. Those proposals go out to all participating schools where students will read and evaluate them. There is a discussion board on the Operation Day's Work web site for students to post comments about the grants. Each school votes on which proposal to support and one is selected for the year. After the proposal is chosen, students organize "work days" to raise funds for the project. In conjunction with the work days, students also carry out education programs in their schools to teach the larger school community about the program and the focus country. ODW is a collaboration among USAID, the International Youth Foundation, and Quest. Beginning in 2000, the program is using curricular materials from the Choices Education Project for its content base.

Moving from Education to Civic Engagement

A public that is attentive to current events and educated on international issues creates a foundation for constituency on global concerns. Participation as an advocate for policy is the next step in this progression. However, any initiative that advocates a particular point of view within the core curriculum will run into difficulties in becoming integrated on a broad scale into our public schools. American public schools were established as places of inquiry, not places of advocacy. While official advocacy of any one point of view is not considered appropriate or productive in American public school classrooms, learning to serve as an advocate for one's point of view is clearly within their purview. Additionally, our public schools are full of examples of extracurricular activities designed to give students experience in advocating for their own point of view — among them Young Democrats and Young Republicans, Amnesty International, and a variety of environmental clubs. As stated earlier, one of the early goals of our public schools was (and continues to be) to prepare the next generation to assume the responsibilities of citizenship. Among these is the responsibility to pay attention to public issues, identify and articulate one's own thinking on the issues, and then step forward to defend that position in the company of others.

Submitted by:

Susan Graseck, Director
Choices for the 21st Century Education Project
Watson Institute for International Studies
Brown University
October, 2000